

THE ZOOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS

1. HISTORICAL NOTES

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In 1835, the Society of Natural History or Physiographic Society was established in Athens by a group of Greek and German naturalists among which were Drs Fraas, Landerer, Linder Mayer, Röser, Rothland, Sertorius, Schuh and others. These Bavarian scientists who came to Greece together with king Otto, were the first to introduce the physical sciences in the new Greek state according to the traditions prevailing at that time in Europe.

The Society started a small natural history museum with the help of its members, a grant from king Otto and the support of the Government. The first collections included mainly birds and minerals. Later, especially after 1843, when most of the German members of the Society had left Greece and the financial support was no longer sufficient, the Society started declining and its collections were not looked after. The University of Athens, established in 1837, had from the beginning been using part of the collections for teaching purposes and had bought for the museum a number of new materials. So, in 1850, the museum was moved temporarily to the central building of the University. Finally, in 1850, since the Society of Natural History could no longer support the museum, it was decided to donate all its natural history collections to the University under the conditions that the University would appoint the direction and the personnel and would find the means for the conservation and enrichment of the collections. Furthermore, the members of the Society would have free access to the collections. The University accepted the donation and decided to appoint a committee composed of Prof. H. Mitsopoulos (1816-1892), Prof. T. Orphanidis (1817-1886) and the German naturalist T. von Heldreich (1822—1902) to propose the regulations for the museum. These regulations were accepted and published in the Government Journal in August 1858. According to these regulations, the museum would be directed by two Directors chosen among the professors of Zoology, Botany, Mineralogy and Geology and one curator. The first directors were Prof. H. Mitsopoulos as director of the zoological, mineralogical and geological departments and Prof. T. Orphanidis as director of the botanical department. As curator was chosen T. von Heldreich.

Immediately after the transfer of the museum to the University, Heldreich was

sent to Europe to visit similar museums especially in Berlin, Munich and Vienna and collect information for the organisation of the museum. At the same time, he together with Prof. Orphanidis started enriching the botanical collections with material from Greece.

With a new decree in 1868, the museum was divided into three collections, the zoological, the mineralogical, geological and paleontological and the botanical collection. T. von Heldreich was appointed curator of the first two and when in 1872 he moved to the post of curator of the botanical collection, he was succeeded by the german naturalist T. Krüper (1830-1917). Prof H. Mitsopoulos who continued as director of both the zoological and mineralogical collections, was succeeded after his death in 1892 by his nephew K. Mitsopoulos (1844-1911) and in 1894 by Prof. N. Apostolidis (1856-1919). In that year, the zoological collection was eventually separated with T. Krüper as its curator. In the same year, the zoological laboratory was established next to the museum with the purpose of assisting the practical education of the students.

The resignation of Prof. Apostolidis in 1917 and the death of T. Krüper in the same year marked the end of the first period of the Zoological Museum. During this period, under the guidance of Krüper and his assistant N. Germanos, the collections were greatly enriched. Special attention was paid to the ornithological and entomological collections. The malacological collection received a very important donation from the french naturalist Josephine Thiesse which included 26000 specimens from 3600 species of land, freshwater and marine molluscs mainly from Greece. Unfortunately, a large part of this collection was lost. Other important donations included a number of mammals, birds and butterflies donated by kings Otto and George, a collection of birds and insects of Brazil donated by C. de Villiard, many birds and shells of India by F.W. Spielter, several fish donated by Domnados and Vouros, 210 bird species donated by M. Ross, 5000 molluscs donated by Atchley and many more. Apart from the donations, the Museum was able to purchase a lot of material both from Greece and abroad. Finally, its collections were enriched with material collected by its personnel, especially T. Krüper, from various localities in Greece. Characteristically, while in 1840, the Museum contained approximately 400 bird species, in 1860 it contained 800 of which 300 were from Greece and 500 from abroad.

In 1917, the chair of Zoology became vacant and until 1933, zoology was taught by the professors of Botany S. Miliarakis (in 1917) and I. Politis (from 1918-1920) the professor of Mineralogy and Petrology C. Ktenas (in 1917, and from 1921-1923) and the professor of Geology and Paleontology T. Skoufos (in 1917 and from 1923-1933). They also served as directors of the Zoological

Museum. During the same period, the curators of the Museum were N. Athanassopoulos (from 1917-1923) and N. Sperantsas (from 1923-1935). It was during this period that the enrichment and modernization of the Museum was slowed down because of the lack of direction and the increasing emphasis on the teaching of zoology and the introduction of experimental zoological research. The collections were not expanded and apart from the purchase of T. Krüper's personal collection in 1919 and the donation of several american animals from Mr. D. Makris in the 30s, no other serious material was added. Characteristically, in 1930 there remained in the Museum only about 400 species of birds and 250 species of mammals. Although the space of the Museum was diminished in order to accomodate the increasing number of students, it continued to be open to the public and in 1932, it received approximately 12000 visitors.

In 1933, Prof. G. Pantazis (1906-1973) was elected for the chair of Zoology. He had studied Medicine at the University of Athens and Zoology at the University of Munich and brought with him the latest advances in experimental Zoology which he planned to bring to Greece. Immediately after his arrival, he reorganised the Zoological Laboratory, brought new equipment, hired new staff and published the journal *Acta Instituti et Musei Universitatis Atheniensis*. Having undertaken the teaching of Biology to the students of medicine, he had to transform the big hall of the Museum into laboratory space and therefore, the exhibitions were left in a space of 700 m². Much of the material was stored. With the help of his staff, Ch. Hatzissarantos (from 1931-1956), A. Kanellis (from 1934-1949), A. Stephanidis (from 1934-1940) and N. Tzelepis (from 1937-1949), he put in order much of the entomological collection to which he personally added a lot of dipteran and acarological material. A. Stephanidis enriched considerably the fish collection and Ch. Hatzissarantos added a very important arachnological collection which included 300 species of greek spiders in 15000 specimens. In 1937, the Museum acquired an important collection of american wildlife donated by Mr. D. Benetatos from Canada.

The Second World War halted all activities in the Zoological Museum. During the German Occupation (1941-1944), the University was closed and the Zoological Laboratory and Museum were used as a hospital by the Germans. After the Liberation, the Museum continued to be used as a hospital by the British during the civil strife of December 1944 - January 1945. When the Museum reopened, it was discovered that it had suffered a lot of damage and many of its collections were missing. The Museum was reopened to the public in the same reduced space as before. However, as the emphasis in the chair of Zoology had shifted towards experimental work, all the money allocated to the Museum was used only for the

conservation of its material. Characteristically, while in 1925 the Museum received 60% of the money given to the chair of Zoology, in 1955 it received only 15%. No new material was bought or added by the staff apart from a few insects.

The situation remained the same after 1961 when Prof. Pantazis moved to the chair of General Biology and was succeeded in Zoology by Prof. V. Kiortsis. It was during this period that plans were made to construct the new buildings of the Faculty of Physical and Mathematical Sciences. In those plans, provision was made for a large space where the Zoological Museum could be placed. However, having to evacuate the spaces that the Museum and Laboratory occupied in the central building of the University in central Athens, it was decided to move them to a small building near the site where the new complex would be built. The building had two stories of which the lower one would be used as a laboratory and the top would house part of the collections of the Museum while the rest would be stored in a nearby storehouse. The transfer took place in 1965. However, as the needs of the Laboratory were increased, it was decided to use the second story for laboratory use as well and to store all the museum material.

The Museum remained in store for seventeen years with only periodical inspections. Then, in 1982, when the new buildings were completed, it was transferred to its new space where it is now under reorganisation. The new facilities include a large exhibition hall of approximately 2200 m² which includes space for dioramas, one room for the preparation and conservation of the material (120 m²) and one room of 190 m² for storing the collections that are not to be exhibited.

It is not known exactly how many specimens and what species of animals are housed in the Museum. It is certain that it contains almost all the bird species of Greece and several specimens from abroad. The mammalian collection has many greek species, especially rodents as well as a few large mammals such as some lions, tigers, a polar bear, a few primates and several deer. The herpetological collection has many greek species. Especially rich is the ichthyological collection with many freshwater fish in good condition. The entomological collection is very rich in Coleoptera and tropical Lepidoptera which are well preserved. The rest, although numerous, are in bad condition. The spiders collected by Hatzissarantos have been well kept. The malacological collection suffered many losses but it still contains more than 300 greek species and many from abroad. Finally, there is a number of other invertebrates. As mentioned before, the condition of many specimens is very bad and perhaps beyond repair. The collections are housed in wooden display furniture most of which was built in the late 19th century. There are no catalogues of species apart from one made in 1930 concerning the birds and the mammals. Many labels have been lost or destroyed.

It is hoped that the Museum will be reorganised soon and reopen for the public and the researchers in order to fulfill its role as an educational and scientific establishment.

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